

**Updated report on the state of preservation  
of the “Western Caucasus” UNESCO World Heritage site  
(Russian Federation, No. 900) in 2023**

**1. Response of the Russian Federation in accordance with the Decision of the World Heritage Committee 45 COM 7B.27**

*Regarding the issue of construction of the Lago-Naki Ski Resort and Mount Tabunnaya Ski Resort on the site and providing the World Heritage Center with detailed information on both projects, indicating their exact location in relation to the site, and an explanation of how such development is consistent with the declarations of waiver from the large-scale infrastructure development on the site.*

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The Russian Federation confirms that it is still considering the possibility of building the Lago-Naki Ski Resort on a limited territory of the Lago-Naki plateau. After completion of the resort master plan and strategic environmental assessment, these documents will be submitted by the Russian Federation to the UNESCO World Heritage Center in accordance with Article 172 of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of UNESCO (hereinafter referred to as the Convention). The decision to begin construction of the resort shall be made only if the UNESCO World Heritage Committee approves the plans for the construction of the resort.

The possibility of building ski infrastructure on Mount Tabunnaya is not being considered.

*Regarding the issue of confirmation that no infrastructure is planned to be built on the territory of the listed site and confirmation of the impossibility of economic development on the territory of the Lago-Naki plateau.*

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In accordance with Article 5 of the Convention, States Parties to the Convention shall, whenever possible, endeavor to ensure the most effective protection and preservation, and the most active promotion of the cultural and natural heritage located on their territory, under the conditions peculiar to each country.

In accordance with clause 96 of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the Convention (hereinafter referred to as the Guidelines), the protection and management of World Heritage sites shall ensure that the outstanding universal value, including the conditions of integrity and/or authenticity that exist at the time of inscription are maintained or improved in future.

Thus, the Convention contains a requirement to preserve the authenticity and integrity of the site and its outstanding universal value. At the same time, no clear and quantitative criteria for assessing the authenticity and integrity of the sites have been developed.

When considering the possibility and feasibility of conducting economic activities on the Lago-Naki plateau, the Russian Federation will follow the spirit of the Convention.

*Regarding the issue of suspending the said infrastructure projects until an environmental impact assessment is conducted in accordance with the Guidelines and the Methodical Manual for Impact Assessment in the context of World Heritage and submitted to the World Heritage Center for consideration by the IUCN.*

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The Russian Federation once again draws the attention of the World Heritage Committee and the World Heritage Center to the fact that the territories of the Sochi All-Republican State Nature Reserve and the Sochi National Park are not part of the “Western Caucasus” World Natural Heritage site.

In relation to the mentioned territories, the Russian Federation has only the obligation set out in Article 96 of the Guidelines. The Russian Federation confirms its intention to comply with the requirements of this Article.

*Regarding the issue of ensuring that the legal provisions in force in relation to all components of the site, in particular natural parks and natural monuments administered by the Republic of Adygea, in accordance with the protection requirements set out in the Operational Guidelines.*

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In accordance with Resolution No. 97 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Adygea dated May 21, 2020, the “Upper reaches of the rivers Pshekha and Pshekhashkha” natural monument of republican significance was reorganized into the “Mountain Adygea” natural park.

In accordance with Resolution No. 116 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Adygea dated June 17, 2020, the “Upper Reach of the Tsitsa River” natural monument of republican significance was reorganized into the “Upper Reach of the Tsitsa River” natural park.

According to the Constitution of the Russian Federation, international treaties of the Russian Federation shall be an integral part of its legal system.

The Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage is an international treaty of the Russian Federation, and the Operational Guidelines are a normative legal document subject to execution within the scope of the Convention.

Therefore, consideration of construction or major rehabilitation works can only be carried out if all the requirements of the Convention and the Operational Guidelines are met.

*Regarding the issue of a new bill that shall allow changing the boundaries of protected natural areas of federal significance for conduction of economic activities.*

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Currently, work on the bill is suspended.

*Regarding the issue of the status of road work on the construction of the road to the Lunnaya Polyana.*

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The road to the Lunnaya Polyana is considered as a forest road used for forestry and fire-fighting purposes to prevent fires, reduce the fire hazard of forests, as well as to extinguish fires. It should be noted, however, that fires can cause greater damage to ecosystems and affect the reduction of the outstanding universal value of a world Natural Heritage site to a greater extent than the operation of a forest road. Fire prevention is especially important due to climate change and the increasing frequency of extreme weather conditions.

*Regarding the issue of construction of a new highway and railway to the Black Sea from the North Caucasus, which will cross the territory of the site.*

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In accordance with Article 5 of the Convention, States Parties to the Convention shall, whenever possible, endeavor to ensure the most effective protection and preservation, and the most active promotion of the cultural and natural heritage located on their territory, under the conditions peculiar to each country.

In accordance with clause 96 of the Guidelines, the protection and management of World Heritage sites shall ensure that the outstanding universal value, including the conditions of integrity and/or authenticity that existed at the time of listing, will be maintained or improved in the future.

Thus, the Convention contains a requirement to preserve the authenticity and integrity of the site and its outstanding universal value. At the same time, clear, quantitative criteria for assessing the authenticity and integrity of the sites have not been developed.

When considering the possibility and feasibility of constructing a new highway and railway to the Black Sea from the North Caucasus, which will cross the territory of the heritage site, the Russian Federation will follow the spirit of the Convention.

*Regarding the issue of defining a strategic approach to tourism development, taking into account the position that the development of large-scale infrastructure on the*

*territory of the Lago-Naki plateau will be the basis for inscription of the site on the List of World Heritage in Danger, including through a strategic environmental impact assessment, which is conducted by identifying suitable alternatives for the development of tourism infrastructure outside the boundaries of the site.*

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In 2023, a number of basic regulatory legal acts were adopted to improve the regulation of recreational activities in specially protected natural areas. The main of these documents is Federal Law No. 77-FZ “On Amending Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation” dated March 18, 2023. In pursuance of this Federal Law, a number of orders and resolutions of the Government of the Russian Federation have been adopted, necessary for its implementation and regulating issues in this area.

In particular, the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation dated October 31, 2023 No. 1811 “On approval of the Rules for calculating the maximum permissible recreational capacity of specially protected natural areas of federal significance in the implementation of tourism” approved the corresponding rules. In connection with the adoption of these regulations, a scientifically based assessment of the recreational capacity of the territory of the Caucasian State Natural Biosphere Reserve shall be conducted.

*Regarding the issue of sending a joint mission of the World Heritage Center/IUCN for active monitoring in order to assist the member country in assessing the state of preservation of the site.*

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The Russian side will inform on the expected dates of the joint reactive monitoring mission of the World Heritage Center and the IUCN to the “Western Caucasus” World Heritage site in the near future in an official manner.

## **2. Information on other current issues related to the preservation of the heritage site**

### **Preservation of natural complexes of the “Western Caucasus” World Heritage site**

In 2023, as before, the core of the nomination — the Caucasian State Natural Biosphere Reserve (93.6% of the entire area of the “Western Caucasus” World Natural Heritage site), — did not experience anthropogenic influence and was in its natural state.

The anthropogenic impact on the remote and hard-to-reach areas of the World Natural Heritage site in question remains minimal: the “Upper Reach of the Tsitsa

River” natural park of the Republic of Adygea (until 2020 — the “Upper Reach of the Tsitsa River” natural monument of the Republic of Adygea), the “Mountain Adygea” natural park of the Republic of Adygea (until 2020 — the “Upper reaches of the rivers Pshekha and Pshekhashkha” natural monument of the Republic of Adygea), the “Bolshoi Tkhach” natural park of the Republic of Adygea, the “Buiny Ridge” natural monument of the Republic of Adygea.

### **Preservation of biological diversity of the “Western Caucasus” World Heritage site**

#### 1. Preservation of the main types of landscapes:

- mountain-forest landscape: complete preservation, no economic activity;
- mountain-meadow landscape: complete preservation, no economic activity;
- mountain-meadow landscape of the biosphere site of the Caucasian Nature Reserve on the Lago-Naki plateau: the state of the meadows has a positive trend, the restoration of plant communities of the Lago-Naki plateau continues after excessive grazing in 1980-90s;
- high-mountain landscape: complete preservation, no economic activity;
- water sites: complete preservation, no economic activity.

#### 2. Preservation of species and species richness:

2.1. Species richness (species composition) is completely preserved. No loss of any species of flora or fauna has been indicated. There is a slow natural restoration of Colchis boxwood due to the preserved undergrowth. No surges in numbers or formation of foci of the boxwood moth (*Cydalima perspectalis* (Walker, 1859) have been recorded.

2.2. The condition of populations of rare species of animals and plants is not deteriorating. The condition of the chestnut plant (*Castanea sativa* Mill.), which is under the inhibitory influence of the phytopathogenic fungus *Cryphonectria parasitica* and the oriental chestnut gall wasp (*Dryocosmus kuriphilus* Yasumatsu, 1951), is being monitored.

2.3. No negative trends in the population dynamics of the main protected mammal species — the most sensitive to anthropogenic influence, — has been indicated. As expected, the numbers of these populations stabilized with an optimal spatial, gender and age structure. This indirectly confirms the assumption that the populations of these mammalian species have reached the limits of the natural capacity of the environment.

2.4. The implementation of the Program for the restoration (reintroduction) of the Persian Leopard in the Caucasus is continuing. Persian leopards, born and raised at the Persian Leopard Breeding (Reintroduction) Center in the Sochi National Park, are being prepared for life in the wild and are regularly released into the wild. In 2023, to continue the formation of a free-living population of this species in the region on the border of the Caucasian State Natural Biosphere Reserve and the “Bolshoi Tkhach” natural park, a female Persian Leopard, a descendant of a pair brought from a Swedish zoo, was released.

### **Management of the “Western Caucasus” World Natural Heritage site**

The management of the “Western Caucasus” World Heritage site remains unchanged compared to 2022.

#### 1. General control and management:

The general control and management of the “Western Caucasus” World Heritage site is conducted by the federal executive authority — the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian Federation.

#### 2. Management of specially protected natural areas of regional significance as part of the “Western Caucasus” World Heritage site:

The management of the “Bolshoi Tkhach” natural park is conducted directly by the ““Bolshoi Tkhach” Natural Park” regional state government institution, which is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of the Republic of Adygea.

The direct management of the “Mountain Adygea” natural park is conducted by the ““Mountain Adygea” Natural Park” regional state government institution, which is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of the Republic of Adygea.

The direct management of the “Upper Reach of the Tsitsa River” natural park is conducted by the “Upper Reach of the Tsitsa River” Natural Park” regional state government institution, which is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of the Republic of Adygea as well.

The management of the “Buiny Ridge” natural monument is conducted directly by the executive authority of the region of the Russian Federation — the Department for Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of the Republic of Adygea.

The management of specially protected natural areas of regional significance occurs on the basis of planning documents approved by the executive authorities of the Republic of Adygea. Financing and control of the management, protection,

conservation, study of these specially protected natural areas of regional significance is conducted by the executive authority of the Republic of Adygea.

3. Management of the federal specially protected natural area as part of the “Western Caucasus” World Heritage site:

The management of the Caucasian Nature Reserve is conducted by the “Caucasian State Natural Biosphere Reserve named after Kh. G. Shaposhnikov” federal state budgetary institution (hereinafter referred to as the Caucasus Nature Reserve), which is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian Federation.

The main management tasks and governing documents have not changed.

In 2023, the Caucasus Nature Reserve was protected by a state inspector staff of 63 state inspectors. The State Inspectorate identified 197 violations of the protection regime of the Caucasus Nature Reserve, including:

- illegal presence on the territory — 134;
- illegal hunting — 2;
- illegal fishing — 19;
- illegal flight and landing of aircraft (helicopter) — 3;
- other — 39.

**3. No major changes are noted and foreseen within the World Heritage site.**